



The BLACK SHAWL

By H. J. Jonas

HOLLYWOOD is a city of mystery. There is about the place an almost tangible feeling of secrets half-revealed, of a word not spoken, but whispered. The very aspect of the gaunt, unreal hills which bend above the garish alley, Hollywood Boulevard, is a provocation to come closer, to learn what lies behind the veils of blue haze draping the mouths of the deep-cleft canyons.

But the real secrets of Hollywood walk about its streets and through the rooms and corridors of its studios and cabarets, locked behind the sealed-up lips of people too powerful, or too valuable, to be involved.

Who killed William Desmond Taylor? What really happened on that yachting trip when Tom Ince died . . . ?

What about the disappearance of

Based on a radio script originally written for the CBS radio program *Suspense*

By

RICHARD LEWIS



Jim Speed and Natalie Chandel?

Everyone remembers how James M. Speed, the most daring and original director in the industry, and Chandel, loveliest of the French importations, walked out of a gay party on a Corinthian Studios sound stage one night in 1935, and out of the world.

The party was in celebration of the completion of shooting on "CARIBBEAN WINDS", Speed's new picture. Also, his close friends revealed later, it was to have been the occasion for the announcement of his engagement to Natalie Chandel.

The revelation caused a sensation in bee-hive Hollywood; Speed was a misogynist more celebrated than Mencken; his views on women were one of the reasons why women flocked to his pictures, seeming to take a masochistic joy in witnessing his vicious portrayals, through his actresses, of members of their sex.

That the famous woman-hater had been even close to an alliance, especially with the lovely Chandel, set gossip columns crazy. But the betrothal was never announced. Speed and Chandel left the party early. The last person to see them alive was a studio policeman who saw the pair get into Speed's convertible. He said they seemed to be arguing about something.

But that was the end of it. Speed and Chandel never were seen again, although the usual reports that they had been glimpsed together cropped up now and then from Paris, Rio,

Shanghai. A *crime passionel* was indicated, but unprovable; the case went to the back of Hollywood police files marked "unsolved".

To Carol Appleby, late of Duluth, Minnesota, none of this was important, as she sat on a bench at the last bus-stop on Birchwood Drive that bright November morning.

What was important to Carol was the report on her screen test of the day before, at Lunar; the efforts of Bill Capper, her agent, doing his level best to land her in second leads instead of speaking bits; the occasional phone call which meant a day's work in pictures and the very welcome money with which to maintain a wardrobe and, incidentally, eat; and, of course, Rob.

And he, as usual, was late. Carol bit her lips in mingled annoyance and anxiety, and nervously consulted her wristwatch. If the bus came, and Rob didn't, it would be a choice between missing him, or missing her appointment with Bill Capper.

She was a small girl with masses of rich, dark hair framing one of those faces which never really lose their loveliness. She wore a gray tailored suit, with a powder-blue jabot at the throat, and blue lace at the wrists. The bench she waited on was taxi-stand as well as bus-depot; a few steps beyond was the small, high-priced food market, the neat drug-store, with barber-shop alongside — the glossy little cluster of shops which catered to the sleek, glamorous denizens of the white stucco castles perched along the

labyrinthine roads on the brush-clad hills above, or snuggled in the sycamore-choked canyons below.

Carol's own home—Rob and his typewriter lived nearby—was "below the market," the invisible dividing line separating the upper-bracket hill-folk from the rent-paying little people.

She looked at her watch again. The bus *was* late. Damn! Bill Capper was always so darned punctual, too. She uttered a distraught little exclamation, just as the elderly lady came up beside the bench, spread her skirts and sat down beside Carol.

"It's late, isn't it?"

"Oh . . . oh, you mean the bus? Yes, it is, isn't it?"

Carol glanced at the woman. She was beyond middle age; her hair was white, silken floss, and there were deep lines in her faded cheeks. But her steel-gray eyes were clear and direct, and the set of the strong lips was firm. Almost grim, until she smiled. Then it was the smile of a woman who understood the quality of charm, and numbered it in her arsenal of endowments.

She was dressed completely in black, Carol saw, from her outmoded black hat, to black shoes and stockings. Around her shoulders she wore a fine black silk shawl against the sharpness of the autumn morning in the canyon-bottom.

Her voice was deep and pleasant, with a precise enunciation that hinted at Eastern finishing-schools far in her past.

"Such a nuisance, depending on

buses."

"It certainly is. Really, I should walk, for the exercise, and keep my pounds down, but there doesn't seem to be time."

The lady gave Carol an appraising, friendly look.

"I shouldn't say you needed to worry about 'pounds,'" she commented. "You're very pretty as you are."

"Thank you . . ." Carol was a little startled, and not displeased.

"Actress?" said the lady in black.

Carol nodded, her cheeks flushing. "As what girl isn't, or doesn't want to be, in this town?"

"Ah! And you've been in pictures, then?"

"Nothing, really. One little speaking role in a Corinthian feature. And extra work. But I have hopes!" She looked at her watch. "Oh, dear, that bus! I'm supposed to meet my agent, and he's *never* late."

"I have an appointment, too," the lady in the shawl murmured. "I get out so seldom—I live up on the hill, there," she nodded vaguely at the whole range, "and it's difficult for one my age to trot about too much, what with a large house to look after."

A spot of yellow slewed out of one of the hill drives and slowed as it neared them. The woman glanced at it, then, standing up, waved a black-gloved hand.

The taxi squalled to a halt beside the bench.

"In with you," said the lady. "We'll ride down. Saves waiting."

No, no," as Carol tried to protest, "I'd have done this anyway, and you might as well come, too, my dear. I insist."

"Well . . ." began Carol. She got in, the driver slammed the door and released the brakes.

"Oh, no!" exclaimed Carol. "Oh, why is he always late!" She gazed with stricken eyes, at the tall young man in sport shirt and slacks who erupted into the street from a side-road, just as the taxi went by. "Oh, it's Rob!" She waved wildly. "Rob . . . Rob!"

The young man was waving wildly, too.

"Oh, wait . . . !" Carol turned to her companion, who was looking straight ahead. It's her taxi, she thought, and I can't ask all my friends in . . . oh, Rob!

She looked pleadingly back into his annoyed eyes as the vehicle sped away downhill, her arms and shoulders fashioned in a helpless shrug.

"By the way," said the lady, "I should introduce myself. I'm Elizabeth Masters. And you, my dear—?"

"I'm Carol Appleby," Carol said.

"A pretty name," said the lady. "A touch of New England, that Appleby. I'm from New England."

"I'm from Duluth," said Carol.

"My son was New England, too. But he loved this California country."

"Where is he now?" asked Carol, to make conversation.

"He's gone." The woman said it simply.

"Oh, I'm sorry."

The well-groomed, comfortable houses along the street, set back among opulent lawns, wheeled past, and the canyon broadened out into the city.

"Miss Appleby," said the lady suddenly, as though coming to a sudden decision, "I am on my way to a personnel agency."

"Indeed?" Carol murmured, not knowing what to say.

"Yes." She turned and looked at her. "I am looking for a—well, a companion. Strictly that. I—I hardly know where to look. I thought of an agency. I need someone to share my house. Oh, not a servant; a companion. Someone who will . . . *temper*, shall I say . . . the emptiness?"

She hesitated, with a faraway look in her steel-gray eyes, then turned them again on Carol.

"Miss Appleby, I like you. I feel drawn to you. Would you care to live with me?"

Carol stammered, half laughing. "But—but—I—I mean, thank you, Miss—er—Mrs. Masters. But I'm afraid—that is, I'm an actress, I must spend time at the studios, I'm away from home most of the time. I—I hardly think it would be practical. You're very kind of course . . ."

"Nonsense," said Elizabeth Masters. "It's you who'd be kind, my dear. Perhaps I shouldn't have said 'companion'; what I really want is someone in the house, another presence there besides my own . . . You could do as you do now. Of course,"

she added, hurriedly, "you would be my guest, but I should feel it necessary to compensate you adequately besides . . ."

"I really don't know . . ." began Carol.

"I know something of Hollywood and girls like yourself," Elizabeth Masters said. "It's hard, isn't it, finding time—and money, too—for everything. I should like to feel I was helping, my dear . . ."

"It's so sweet of you," said Carol, impulsively. "I . . . I must think it over."

"Certainly, my dear. Do so. Shall we say this—let me know by tomorrow evening. If you do decide to accept, be at the bench where we met this morning, at eight o'clock. I'll be waiting at that time."

"Couldn't I phone you . . ."

"No, at eight o'clock, then on the bench." The taxi stopped beside a busy corner in downtown Hollywood, and she got out. She handed the driver a bill. "Take Miss Appleby to her appointment. I hope you decide to accept, my dear . . ."

The taxi ground away from the curb. Carol took with her a picture of Elizabeth Masters' strong face, with its steel-gray eyes and set lips, under the odd, old hat, looking after the taxi.

She knew, instinctively, that Rob would be opposed to the idea. He was.

They were on their after-nine o'clock walk up Birchwood beyond the little business district, into the depths of the canyon, where the

lights of the houses glowed dimly through the masking shrubbery, and cars went by infrequently. There was a sharp, herbal scent from the sage and sumac which clothed the hills above the trees.

"I don't like it," Rob said, stubbornly.

"But why, darling . . . ?"

"Well . . . damn it, baby, you're an actress, not a lady's maid or something. It's—it's fantastic, that's all."

Carol didn't tell him she had already begun packing.

"A companion, Rob. She understands what I do. She was insistent it wouldn't interfere with my work in the slightest. Just think, I'd get out of paying rent, and my meals, and some extra money besides! All for just living in the same house with a lonely old woman who's—well, sort of sweet."

"Sweet!" He gave a mock shudder, walking beside her. "I saw her—just as you were getting into that taxi. What a creature! Black from head to foot, like an aged female spider. Like the bat-woman in a Universal horror thriller."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Rob! She's a cultured woman with conservative tastes in clothes."

"Where is this place of hers?"

"Why . . ." Carol hesitated. "I don't know, actually. She—she didn't say. I'm to meet her, is all."

"I don't like it," he repeated. "I think you shouldn't do it, Carol."

A worm of perversity turned in Carol.

"I don't see that you're exactly entitled to advise me, darling," she heard herself saying. "After all, I still look to myself for everything I get, don't I?"

Then she could have cried aloud. "Rob—Rob! I didn't mean that! Honestly, darling, I didn't!"

But what she did was say nothing.

Rob said nothing, too, for a long moment. There was no sound but their footsteps on the thin gravel of the road.

"Of course you're right, Carol," he said, finally. I *don't* have much right to advise you, do I?"

He waited for her to say something, and she did not. After a moment, he changed the subject. When he said goodnight, he kissed her lightly on the tip of her nose, turned on his heel and walked away.

Rob's kisses usually were not the tip-of-the-nose variety. Quite otherwise . . .

"I'll telephone you the minute I'm settled, darling!" She called out after him. Oh damn! she thought. Why does he have to go on a binge of damned masculine pride over something that's plain practical common sense?

She looked up at the hills, shouldering dimly against the light night sky. A big plane, red and green lights winking at its wingtips, droned across the range.

Somewhere up there is Mrs. Masters' house, Carol thought.

THE TAXI groaned up a steep pitch in second gear and rounded a hairpin curve with a white-painted guard-rail at the outer edge. Carol, staring out into the gloom, realized she was lost, not five minutes after meeting Mrs. Elizabeth Masters at the taxi stand.

A thick fog, an exotic phenomenon in autumnal California, had crept in from the Pacific, shrouding the banks of the hills and filling the canyons, limiting vision to a few misty yards. The taxi seemed at times on a treadmill in a world of clouds.

Mrs. Masters sat in a corner without talking. Carol had essayed conversation, but when answered in monosyllables, gave up.

Now the woman leaned forward, peered into the fog.

"Turn right down this next road," She ordered the driver.

"I don't see no—" began the cabby, in a gravelly voice, when a turnoff emerged miraculously from the mists, and he swung the car into it, muttering something about "godforsaken place."

They jolted over an unpaved road for possibly two hundred yards.

"Stop!" commanded Mrs. Masters.

"I don't see nothin'," reiterated the driver.

"Allow me to decide, then," snapped Mrs. Masters, crisply. She opened the door, and got out, and the driver killed the motor.

Utter silence ensued. To Carol it seemed that, in the stillness of the

hills, she could almost hear the woolly wisps of fog sifting through the leaves of the brush along the roadside.

"This way," said Elizabeth Masters, and her voice seemed to echo along the invisible hillside. "Follow us with the luggage, driver."

She led off down the hillside at a grenadier pace, along what appeared to be a driveway. Carol felt broken, weedy pavement under her feet. The wild, untended-looking hedge borders were faintly discernible through the fog. The girl sensed rather than saw the steep drop into the canyon beyond.

A dark, imposing massiveness loomed ahead of the woman's black, striding figure. They came nearer, and it resolved itself into a house—but a very odd house. There was a high wall, blank and windowless, so far as could be seen. Blank, that is, except for the doorway. Carol looked up and gasped at the huge, stony canopy above her. The thing projected from the wall a good ten feet, narrowing to a point. Beneath it, a deep recess sank into the wall, with a smallish door at its inner extreme.

Mrs. Masters turned a key in the door; it swung inward and revealed a long low passage, innocent of doors, with dull yellow bulbs burning in sconces its full length.

"Welcome, Carol," she said quietly. "Welcome to Masters House."

"It's—it's quite an unusual place, from the outside." Carol said.

Her voice sounded childish and weak to her. Somewhere in her was a small, growing area of sick misgiving.

"Yes, isn't it unusual?" Mrs. Masters was agreeing coolly. She looked at Carol. "My son designed it," she said.

The baggage-cumbered footsteps of the cabby clumped nearer. He appeared in the light, loaded down with luggage.

"In here," the woman told him curtly. She gave him a bill. "That's all, my man."

"You said it, lady!" The gravel-voiced driver eyed the eccentric doorway effects, pocketed the money, and walked away up the drive.

"I'll show you to your room, Carol," Elizabeth Masters said, as the door snapped shut.

"One thing, Mrs. Masters." Carol tried to make her voice casual. "Would you show me the phone? I'd like to make a call."

The gray eyes wavered a single instant. "Oh—the telephone? Oh, I'm so sorry. You see, there is no telephone—"

"Oh, but that's impossible!" A long finger-nail of fear tickled coldly somewhere close to her heart. "Oh, but there's *got* to be a telephone! I—I assumed, when I . . . that is, I should have asked, of course. I simply can't manage—I *must* be able to get calls. I—maybe, in view of that, I'd better not—"

"I was about to say, Carol,"

Elizabeth Masters said, an edge of reproof in her voice, "that I have applied for a telephone, in anticipation of your coming. It will be a day or two, at most. Surely, one or two days . . ."

"Oh, I see."

"I'll show you your room," Elizabeth Masters repeated. She led the way toward the end of the passage.

"**R**OB . . . Rob!" The sound of her own voice awakened Carol, and the realization that she had been calling out in a dream switched to remembrance of where she was. She opened her eyes and looked around her.

It was a small, almost monastic room—clean, off-white walls, a simple "California" bed and chest of drawers, with a mirror.

It had a window.

Almost as she thought, Carol was beside the window, staring out into the sunshine.

Out *and* down; far below, the steep hillside divided into spurs, their grey-green chaparral-cover stippled with white red-roofed houses. Far beyond, through the normal haze, the vast expanse of the city glinted dimly.

She realized that the house would probably be higher than any other on that side of the range.

Her watch said it was past ten in the morning. Dressing quickly, she followed the bare hallways and narrow stairs to the entrance hall.

The house was as silent as it had been the night before.

Pinned to the inner side of the door was a note: "Carol: I shall be back by noon. E. M."

Back by noon. Where had Elizabeth Masters gone? If into the city, *how* had she gone? There was obviously no car, since she used taxis. There was no phone, so no taxi could be called.

I'll step outside, Carol thought, have a breath of fresh air, and then look for something to eat.

She turned the doorknob, and nothing happened. She pushed on the heavy, carved door . . . rattled the handle.

It was definitely locked.

Carol fought down the panic that rose in waves inside her. I've got to get word to Rob, she thought. But how . . . ? The absurd fact was that she had no idea even where she was—no address, no street. Even if she knew . . .

Why was the door locked?

Carol stared at the smooth dull-white walls of the passage, the light sconces, the dark low door at the inner end.

"I won't, I won't I won't!" she cried to the bare walls, an unbroken sob in her voice. "*Rob* . . . !"

She stopped. The echoes died in the long, close passageway, and she stood, listening.

It had sounded like a series of thumps, or blows, and it had come from somewhere above. She listened and heard nothing more. Opening her lips, she shouted experimentally.

"Hey . . . !"

The front door opened, and Elizabeth Masters stepped into the passage, closing the door after her with a snap of the lock.

"Good morning, Carol," she said, pleasantly. Her white head was bare, and she was dressed in black, with the silken shawl around her shoulders.

Carol stared a long moment at her.

"Good morning," she said finally.

"Well," the woman said briskly, "and have you had your breakfast? No? Then you must have some. Come along to the kitchen."

Wordlessly, Carol followed her down more passages, and through a strange dining room with heavy, black-wood furniture and walls of a faint jungle-green, into an ordinary, prosaic kitchen.

Carol sank silently into an ivory-painted chair, while Elizabeth Masters, without doffing her black shawl, became quietly efficient over a gas range. The heartening aroma of frying bacon and fresh coffee filled the room.

"Well, how do you like it?" Mrs. Masters was saying, over a cup of coffee, as Carol ate.

"What? Oh . . ." Carol paused, let out her breath slowly. "It's—it's a strange house, you have," she said carefully.

Suddenly she burst out with it. "Mrs. Masters, why was the front door locked?"

Elizabeth Masters' brows lifted. "Locked . . . ? The door?" She made a small moue of exasperation. "Oh . . . ! Fancy that! I must

have done it without thinking. I've been alone so long."

"Of course," Carol said. *Of course*, she repeated to herself, with something less than the acceptance her voice implied.

"Tell me about yourself, Carol. What do you see for yourself, in the future?"

I've been silly, Carol thought. The strangeness of the place, the fog, no phone, that locked door . . .

"Acting, I hope," she smiled. "Lots of it—endless years of it. It's the thing I love!"

"And that young man I saw? Is he a thing you love, too?"

Carol blushed. "Yes," she said. "Very much."

"It's the one thing that matters, isn't it?" mused Elizabeth Masters, in a reminiscent tone. "Having someone to care for—I know. Before my son left me, I wanted nothing more than to be with him."

"Your son—was he an architect?"

"That was an avocation," Mrs. Masters smiled almost fiercely. "He was much more, much more. He had power, he saw things as a god sees them, he translated heaven to earth, and earth to heaven . . ."

Her voice trailed away on an exalted tone, her deep-hewn features transfigured by emotion.

"What was your son?" Carol asked, curiously.

"Have more coffee," Elizabeth Masters said, in a flat voice. She drew the black shawl tighter around her broad shoulders. "It's chilly in

here," she said. "This hillside should be warm, but it isn't."

"I think it's quite comfortable," Carol said, mildly. "Oh, by the way—do you think the phone will be in today?"

"I doubt it. More probably, tomorrow."

"I was half expecting a call from my agent," Carol began. "I really should get in touch with him. Is there a house near here where I could telephone?"

"No," said Elizabeth Masters. "The nearest house is some distance."

"Oh," Carol said. "Well, then," she decided, "I'll just walk over to it, anyway. Do me good." She stood up.

"Carol!" exclaimed Mrs. Masters. She stood up too. Then she smiled pleasantly. "I'm afraid you wouldn't have much success. I—I'm not on good terms with some of the people farther down the hill. Nothing important—little misunderstandings. They're not very ready to let strangers in, either. Perhaps tomorrow, when the telephone comes, will be soon enough for you."

The cold finger-nail of fear moved softly again. Carol sat down.

"In that case," she said lightly, "I guess I'll write some letters." She made a little smile appear. "I need a rest, anyway. One should get completely out of touch, occasionally, don't you think?"

Elizabeth Masters came close to Carol. The girl sat watching her, still smiling. The steel-gray eyes

dwelt on the young face.

"My son always liked a smile on a woman's face," Elizabeth Masters said, her voice low and rough, as under heavy emotional stress. "He used to say that a woman's face without a smile might as well be a dead face."

CAROL CAME down the steps from her room and into the yellow-lit central hallway, and the door at the far end opened to show Elizabeth Masters, watching. A shaft of late afternoon red sunlight from an unseen window slanted past her into the passageway, in fiery contrast to the changeless glow of the interior lights.

Carol spoke. "I've finished my letter. Where's the closest mailbox?" Her heart leaped and pounded as she asked the question, but her small chin was tilted and defiant. The eyes of the two women met, and what might have been a sigh escaped the lips of the older one.

"There's no mail-box within walking distance, I'm afraid," she said, matter-of-factly. "I'll mail it for you, in the morning."

"But I want this letter to go out tonight," Carol declared.

"I'm afraid it will have to wait until morning," Mrs. Masters said tonelessly.

In one impulsive movement, Carol was in front of her, giving back look for look to the grim carved countenance with the gray eyes that bowed so steadily at her.

"Why am I being kept prisoner

here, Mrs. Masters? Oh, no, let me talk," as the woman opened her lips—"I'm no fool. That locked door this morning was no accident. It's very odd that you never mentioned an address to me, that you haven't a telephone. As a matter of fact, I don't believe you've applied for a telephone at all, Mrs. Masters!"

Elizabeth Masters said nothing.

Carol met her gaze for a moment, then turned, marched along the passageway to the front door, and turned the handle.

Again the door was locked.

Elizabeth Masters still watched from the doorway at the end of the passage.

"I want to get out!" Carol cried, on a thin panicked note. "You can't keep me here, you *can't* keep me here..."

Elizabeth Masters made a sudden movement. "Be quiet, you little fool!" she ordered, hoarsely, and stood still again, as if listening.

Carol caught the contagion of her attitude, and listened with her.

It was a series of dull, solid knocks, and the sounds came from above them. They were the blows the girl had thought she heard earlier in the day.

"Excuse me," murmured Elizabeth Masters.

Turning, she retreated through the door at the end of the passage, and closed it behind her.

Carol ran silently to the door after her, tried it gently. It was unlocked. She opened it, and stepped into the connecting passage.

It was as if a section of wall had swung back in the shape of a door. It stood ajar, opening onto a small vestibule beyond. Carol stepped through the swinging wall.

She found herself at the foot of a small flight of stairs. Halfway up them in semi-darkness stood the tall, black-clad form of Elizabeth Masters, her face contorted.

"Carol!" Her voice snapped like a whip. "Remain where you are!" At the words, as if on a signal, a high, querying whine sounded somewhere nearby, subsiding into whimpers and grunts. Carol's skin prickled.

"Go back . . . !" There was fury in the woman's voice. "Go back, or I'll—"

The muttering, snuffling noises quickened at the sound. There was an effect of slow, shuffling footfalls, followed by a tentative scratching noise.

The woman turned an anguished face upward toward the sounds, and moaned softly. She wrung her hands, as one in the grip of indecision.

There was an angry scream from above, and Elizabeth Masters ran up the stairs, and vanished into gloom at the top of the short flight. Carol heard a key turn in a lock, and the sound of a closing door.

She went up the stairs cautiously, stood on a small landing. The animal noises were on a lower key. They contained a note of calm now, or satisfaction.

Carol opened the door and looked.

She got the impression of a large, dimly lit room, containing a bed.

There was a strong odor. Also, there were Elizabeth Masters and something else, a manlike shape, with a hairy head, crouching against the woman, uttering snuffling, whimpering noises, pawing with its hands.

The woman spoke soothingly as Carol opened the door.

"Jimmy . . . Jimmy . . . it's all right, dear . . ."

Carol screamed, and covered her face with her hands, and the woman and the hairy thing looked toward the door. Carol's hands dropped, and she glimpsed sagging lips and eyes that flamed hotly in the dim light.

"Fool!" rasped the woman. "You little fool!"

With a feral cry, the creature stumbled toward Carol. Elizabeth Masters, moving swiftly, threw herself in front of the shambling shape and slammed the door in Carol's face. A heavy body lunged against the inner surface.

Hands clawed and beat against the panels, and the whimpers swelled into a torrent of reasonless rage. Carol turned and ran down the stairs, in wild, unreasoning panic.

As she went, Elizabeth Master's voice was faintly audible.

"Jimmy, Jimmy, dear . . . please, please . . ."

PURPLE twilight flowed into the canyons and crept up the brush-covered hills; the airway beacons atop the peaks winked on and stabbed their wheeling beams into the darkening evening skies. In the kitchen of the house high on the

steep face of the Hollywood hills, the girl sat at the table in darkness, her head on her arms. She was not crying, now; she sat numbly in the kitchen, without moving, the shadow-filled house silent around her, its heavy locked doors and high windows impervious.

A soft sound like a stealthy footstep came from beyond the kitchen door. Carol Appleby's head jerked up and turned toward the door. Her eyes were wide and terrified in the brooding dusk, but she did not move or cry out.

The door swung slowly inward.

The girl's lips parted in the shape of a scream, but the sound was frozen in her throat.

Elizabeth Masters stepped into the room and shut the door behind her. She took a key from a pocket and turned it in the lock. She touched a switch and flooded the apartment with light. Then she sat down at the table, facing Carol.

The woman's once-firm mouth trembled before she spoke.

"I—I think we're safe. He's—quiet, now."

"You locked the door behind you." Carol said it in a whisper. "You're frightened."

The woman did not answer; and Carol repeated, "You're frightened." She began to laugh softly, in spite of herself, laughter that infringed on hysteria. "You locked the door to keep *me* in; now you're locking it to keep that—that slobbering idiot out—"

"Carol!"

Elizabeth Masters shouted the word. The girl was silent, now, except for the sobbing intake of her breathing.

"All right," the woman said finally. "All right, my son *is* an idiot."

"Your son . . . ?"

"My son, James M. Speed," the woman said quietly.

"James M. Speed . . ." Carol breathed, softly, amazedly.

"I see you know the name," the woman nodded. "It's a name not unknown in—in Hollywood, even now."

"James M. Speed . . ." Carol saw again the crouched, hulking figure, the lolling mouth and wild eyes, heard the shapeless, whimpering cries.

"Oh, no," she whispered. "No . . ."

"Oh, yes," Elizabeth Masters Speed said. "I suppose," she went on, almost musingly, "that it was natural my son should compare all other women to me—to their disadvantage. Perhaps I—over-encouraged him in his normal, boyish adoration of his mother. He always found them so imperfect, he said." She smiled proudly, complacently. "Perhaps I should have warned him against it. Perhaps . . ."

Carol looked at her as at a crawling, revolting thing. "You fed on it," she whispered. "You loved it, didn't you?"

Elizabeth Speed was not listening. "My son easily detected the differences between his mother and ordinary women," she said proudly.

"Until . . . until that foreign doxy,

that posturing, honey-lipped, black-eyed Parisian witch!" She released the invective caressingly, lingeringly. "I knew," she said, "that for Jimmy's good, *she must be dealt with!*"

"Natalie Chandel!"

The woman laughed through set teeth. "I see you know *her* name, too!! Yes, the story is rather celebrated, in Hollywood," she said with grim satisfaction.

Carol's horrified mind reconstructed the situation—a brilliant director burdened by a twisted complex his mother had nurtured in him; the domineering, jealous old woman; and the lovely, captivating Chandel, so exquisitely, triumphantly charming that she won even James Speed—totally unaware of the hatred and malice that were plotting her confusion . . .

Carol became aware of what Elizabeth Speed was saying . . .

"How you resemble her, my dear!" Her bright gray gaze turned burningly on Carol. "You gave me quite a turn, that day I saw you! For a moment, I thought . . ."

"For a moment," Carol cut in, "you thought I was Natalie Chandel. Yes, Mrs. Speed, I know that. People have told me that." The woman made as if to speak, and Carol drove on. "And you killed her, Mrs. Speed; you killed Natalie Chandel, rather than see your son be happy with her. It drove him mad, didn't it?"

"How right you are, my dear," said Elizabeth Speed somberly. "And now, of course, you know entirely

too much. I'm afraid I shall have to dispose of you, as I disposed of her."

She took the black silk shawl from her powerful shoulders, and held it draped across her extended arms like a votive offering.

"She was wearing it that night," she said musingly. "It was beautiful, around her shoulders. It looked much better around her throat!" she spat, with sudden viciousness. She took the black thing in her hands and grasped the folds tightly, eyeing Carol. "What a pretty neck you have, my dear," she said, smiling quietly.

"Wait a minute," said Carol, over the panicky pounding of her heart. "You're lying, Mrs. Speed—lying." She appraised the woman swiftly. "How could you have gotten Chandel to a spot where you could murder her? That's absurd!"

The jibe took effect.

"It was simple," the woman said complacently. She laid the shawl over her arm. "The French fool! I fed her rumors; it is so easy in Hollywood. How Jimmy's mother was 'queer'; how she 'hated' her prospective daughter-in-law. Naturally, the fool told Jimmy, and Jimmy insisted she come to see me, personally, that night . . ."

She sighed. "I was going to get rid of him, and then get rid of her." Her gaze was focussed on the past, now. "But . . . but it . . . he came back . . . he saw us . . . he caught me, caught his mother . . . one of the two women he loved, killing

the other . . .!"

"He went mad," said Carol in a hushed voice.

"He tried to kill me, first," the woman whispered.

"You didn't love him!" blazed Carol. "You foul, evil, unspeakable creature!"

"Thank you, my dear." Elizabeth Speed was smiling again. She took the black shawl again in her hands. "Well," she said, "shall we—"

The knocking on the front door was a clean, honest sound, lancing through the miasma of hate and insanity in the kitchen. It was solid, imperative knocking that demanded an answer.

With incredible swiftness, the woman was beside Carol. Powerful arms encircled the girl. Carol struggled, but she was no match for Elizabeth Speed. The black shawl came down over her eyes and mouth, wrapped tight around her face, fold on fold.

"You won't be able to talk for awhile," chuckled the woman. "By that time, we'll be rid of whoever—" Carol heard the key turn in the lock—"this may be." The door snapped shut, and the key was turned again from the other side. The girl's hands flew to the shawl. The thick knot at the back of her head was tight. As her soft fingers tore at the adamant cloth, she could hear the woman's firm footstep going down the long central passageway.

On a sudden impulse, she laid her ear against the locked door.

Then she heard it—Rob's voice, his own good voice, clear, firm, blessedly familiar. "I'm looking for a Miss Carol Appleby."

"There's no such person living here," she heard the woman say tonelessly.

"Are you sure of that?" Rob's voice was unperturbed. "It seems to me I recognize you, madam. You look exactly like the woman Miss Appleby told me she was taking a position with. She promised to call me."

"You're completely mistaken, young man. I know no girl of that name."

"I see." Carol, her fingers plucking at the knot, her nails jagged and torn on the strong fabric, heard him raise his voice and call out to someone. "Lafferty—come on down here!"

There was a pause. Then Rob spoke again. "This the woman you brought up here last night?"

"That's her," spoke a gravelly voice. "Same dame. Called me 'my man'!"

"This the house?"

"Sure is. Couldn't forget this joint in a million years."

"Well, madam . . .?" said Rob's voice. Now it was a very rough voice. "Where is Miss Appleby?"

"It's a lie!" screamed Elizabeth Speed. "Lies, lies, lies! Get out, get out, do you hear? This is my house! Go away!"

The knot came loose. Carol tore the enveloping folds from her mouth and gasped a full breath.

"Rob!" she screamed. "Rob! Rob! I'm here! It's Carol, Rob! I'm here!"

There were startled oaths, mingled with the renewed screaming of Elizabeth Speed, and the sounds of a scuffle.

"Take care of her, Lafferty!" Rob called. Then his feet were running toward her, and she called out to him again.

"You need a key, Rob!" She was half crying, half laughing. "She has it!"

In a moment he was back. "She ain't got it now, honey!"

The lock clicked, and then she was in his arms, laughing, crying. "Oh, Rob—Rob!"

She still grasped the black shawl in one hand.

"Hey, take it easy, baby." He shook her lightly. "Hey!" he said, "what's that?"

It was a growling, whining sound from above them. Carol put a hand to her mouth. "Oh . . .!" she exclaimed.

The muttering whines crescendoed into a sudden angry roar. There was a rain of blows that shook the whole building.

"My God!" Rob said. He looked at Carol. "What in the name of—"

A terrific impact as of a heavy body striking a barrier jarred the utensils on the shelves. It was followed immediately by sounds of rending wood and a second crash.

Then there were triumphant, snarling cries, as feet pounded on

stairs. A door was flung back in the passage outside the kitchen. The snuffling growls descended in key a moment as if in doubt. Then Elizabeth Speed cried out.

"Jimmy . . Jimmy . . oh, Jimmy . ."

"He's loose . . !" Carol breathed.

"Rob!" yelled Lafferty's voice. "For God's sake, come 'ere!"

They were running along the passage, then, toward the front of the house. In the dim yellow light, they could see Lafferty fighting desperately against a creature out of a horror movie. Elizabeth Speed lay to one side, against the wall, moaning feebly.

"Hang on, Lafferty!" Rob shouted. He started toward the grappling pair.

Lafferty's eyes rolled toward them. "Rob—for God's sake!"

Carol was walking toward him. Rob stared. "Carol . . !" he exclaimed.

"Mr. Speed!" the girl said, in a clear, strong voice.

The blackened, powerful hands at the cabbie's throat slackened their grip. Red-rimmed eyes swivelled toward the girl. Lolling lips drooped in a hairy face.

The girl spoke again. "Jim . . Jimmy . . ." There was in her voice the hint of a provocative French accent.

The reddened eyes glared at the girl. Suddenly the loose lips writhed, as sound tried to take a form between them. The creature gasped and mumbled. All at once, the word came that he was seeking—indis-

tinct, then clearly, in a choking whisper.

"Natalie . . Natalie . . Natalie . ."

It was a sob, now. The hulking body straightened. The thing took a step toward the girl.

"Natalie!"

It was a man's voice, deep, magnetic. Carol shivered at the sound.

"Jimmy," she said, smiling.

The terrible, semi-human features seemed to be losing their bestiality. There was humanity in the red-rimmed eyes looking at the girl. And then, a change in the eyes. Now they were not looking at Carol. The girl followed their gaze, saw it fixed on the shawl in her hand.

She gasped, as the eyes flicked from the shawl to the form of Elizabeth Speed on the floor.

It was done in a second. The creature had the shawl, Carol was flung aside, and the idiot was sprawled on hands and knees above the writhing, kicking body of Elizabeth Speed. Its hands were at her throat, and the black shawl was around that strong throat, choking, strangling . . .

As the combined strength of the two men got the thing that once had been James Speed away from the body that had been his mother, the creature turned on them with such a growl of rage that both Rob and the taxi-driver instinctively fell back for a second. The wild eyes glared around, at bay.

Suddenly, with a shrill cry, in which was blended anger, terror, de-

spair and something else unspeakable, the lurching shape sprang toward the doorway and out into the night.

They were only a moment behind. Lafferty ran to the hedge, peered through it, and drew in his breath sharply.

"Two hundred feet straight down, anyway!" he breathed.

Carol was sobbing softly.

"Don't you see, Rob—it worked, it worked. That was why

she brought me here. But it was too late . . ."

"What are you talking about, baby?"

"Never mind—let's get away from here, Rob."

Beyond the broken hedge, beyond the vast depth of the canyon, beyond the spurs of the rugged hills, the rainbow lights of Hollywood winked and glittered through the soft clear autumn night.

William Spier, producer of "Suspense", is one of radio's champion shoe wearer-outers. During rehearsals Spier paces back and forth across the CBS studio stage. A colleague clocked him recently at 87 paces per minute—5,500 feet for one rehearsal!
